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SUBJECT: PACOM COMMANDER ADM FALLON MEETING WITH NATIONAL
SECURITY ADVISER: SOUTH, BURMA, CHINA, ET AL.

Classified By: AMB Ralph L. Boyce. Reasons 1.4 (a and d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a May 3 meeting with visiting PACOM Commander ADM William J. Fallon, the Chairman of Thailand's National Security Council, General Winai Phattiyakul, expressed Thailand's support for the continued "strong presence" of the US military in the Asia-Pacific region. Winai commented that the Thai military was in the South principally to provide support for the understaffed police and would stay in that role for at least one to two years to provide stability. He regretted Thailand's initial assessment that criminals were primarily responsible for Southern violence and said that Thai leaders now blamed the problems on youth who had been misled by extremist religious teachers. Winai reiterated that Thailand was trying to win the "hearts and minds" of Thailand's Southern Malay-Muslim population. Regarding Burma, he downplayed joint Thai-Burmese border patrols as a normal and necessary activity between neighboring countries. He asserted that Burma would not have democracy anytime soon, and that the Rangoon government would surely use the upcoming National Convention to ensure it stayed in power. He opined that China's regional clout would continue to grow "faster than everyone expects". END SUMMARY

2. (U) Admiral William J. Fallon, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) met with the Chairman of Thailand's National Security Council, General Winai Phattiyakul on May 3 in Bangkok. Both men expressed their satisfaction with the state of the military and security relationship between the U.S. and Thailand, which was apparent in the seamless U.S.-Thai coordination and cooperation after the December 26 tsunami, and the May 2 inauguration of the latest Cobra Gold

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military exercise. General Winai expressed his pleasure with the new multilateral nature of Cobra Gold, and Admiral Fallon commented that the inclusion of the Japanese in the exercise was a welcome development. General Winai spoke of the importance of retaining a strong U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, which helped maintain stability.

NEW ROLES FOR THE THAI MILITARY

3. (C) When asked about the military presence in the South, Winai emphasized that Thailand was trying to have its military play a greater role in assisting national development and helping with disaster relief in addition to its traditional combat-oriented duties. He noted that, although there had been a lot of criticism directed at Thailand's deployment of troops to the South, the southern deployment was necessary for the security of the region. Before the RTA beefed up its presence there, he noted, the region had "less than 50 percent" of the personnel needed to effectively police the area. The military was there to help provide stability and to work "side-by-side" with the police, he said.

CONTINUED MILITARY PRESENCE

4. (C) Winai added that it was essential for the military to stay in the South for at least one to two more years. He stated that the imposition of military law in areas of the South was necessary to provide a legal basis for the military to support the police. Nonetheless, he said that lifting martial law was already being considered in certain districts in the three Southernmost provinces. Winai asserted that Thailand's number one priority was to provide safety and security to innocent people, and regretted that they had not been successful in doing this in the South. Although Thailand was trying hard to win the hearts and minds, he noted that many local people remained afraid to cooperate with government officials. The RTG, he said, needed to find a way to regain the confidence of the predominantly Malay-Muslim population.

PAST MISTAKES

5. (C) Winai regretted that the Thai Government's initial assessment of the situation in the South was "not 100 percent correct". While Government officials had originally believed the violence was caused by poverty, unemployment and "young

drug addicts," they were now inclined to believe that the young men responsible for the unrest had been "indoctrinated by their religious teachers." When asked whether Thai Muslims were well represented in local administration, Winai replied that, although programs encouraging the participation of Thai Muslims in schools, the armed forces and police existed, these efforts had backslid in the past few years. Winai told Admiral Fallon that the RTG was working to improve Thailand's image in Muslim countries in order to counter negative perceptions resulting from its handling of the violence in the South.

FRANK TALK ON BURMA

16. (C) When asked about Thailand's recent invitation to Burma to begin joint border patrols, Winai replied that Thailand felt the need to have a mechanism in place to ensure that minor border disputes did not escalate into larger conflicts, arguing that these patrols were a normal matter of course for two neighboring countries. He also noted that Burma "always accuses" Thailand of assisting dissident groups on the border, and admitted that in the past there may have been some merit to the claims. He emphasized that Thailand now had a policy of not providing any assistance to armed dissident groups on the border. In his closing comments, Winai added that Thailand was "embarrassed" that there were those who perceived its policy towards Burma as being at odds with that of the international community.

17. (C) Winai noted that there had recently been some major changes in the Burmese government resulting in the former Prime Minister being sacked. He also noted that when the Thai Supreme Commander Chaisit Shinawatra led a delegation to Burma in February, the Burmese government went to great pains to emphasize that widespread international rumors of continued rifts within the governing SPDC were untrue. The Burmese admitted to "having problems" since October, but said that they were looking forward to reconvening the National Convention.

18. (C) Winai said that he did not expect much real progress to be made on Burma. "If (Americans) expect to see real democracy in Myanmar," they will be "disappointed." Winai speculated that the Burmese government would use every means at its disposal to influence the writing of a new constitution to maintain its grip on power. It would be highly unlikely for any government in Rangoon to be able to meet Western standards for democracy any time soon, he opined.

CHINA

19. (C) Winai suggested that China's importance as a regional economic power would definitely continue to grow, "perhaps even faster than everyone expects." This would probably lead to the development of a stronger Chinese military. After Admiral Fallon noted that military expenditures in China were already on the increase, Winai said that this was yet another reason that Thailand favored a continued strong U.S. military presence in the region. Winai added that relations with China would be a good discussion topic for Admiral Fallon's May 4 meeting with Prime Minister Thaksin.

BOYCE